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Message Text

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67
ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

SR-02 ORM-01 AID-05 FDRE-00 SSO-00 /073 W
---------- 108301
R 040754Z APR 75
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5414
INFO AMCONSUL SYDNEY
AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2083

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: AS, VS, PFOR, PINT
SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN REACTION TO DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. SUMMARY: INITIAL AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE TO IMMEDIATE DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING. THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT HAS EXPEDITED ASSISTANCE FOR THE RELIEF OF REFUGEES AND IS BEING GOADED TO DO EVEN MORE BY THE OPPOSITION. THE GENERAL FEELING HERE IS ONE OF COMPASSION AND CONCERN FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE COMMUNIST ONSLAUGHT, AND IT IS CLEAR THAT AUSTRALIA WILL DO MORE THAN ITS SHARE TO PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE. REGRETABLY, THE RENEWED FIGHTING IN VIETNAM HAS ALSO RE-OPENED OLD WOUNDS. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CAIRNS FOR ONE HAS ADOPTED AN I-TOLD-YOU-SO ATTITUDE ABOUT VIETNAM DEVELOPMENTS, REASSERTING VIEWS HE HAS HELD FOR YEARS. HE SAID A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO END THE BLOODSHED. OPPOSITION POLITICIANS HAVE ATTACKED CAIRNS AND ALSO USED THE VIETNAM DEBACLE AS A VEHICLE FOR ATTACKING THE DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY PROGRAMS OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT. EVENTS IN VIETNAM HAVE ALSO RAISED QUESTIONS LARGELY IN MEDIA ABOUT THE VALIDITY OF US SECURITY GUARANTEES AS WELL AS FEARS THAT THE UNITED STATES IS RETREATING INTO ISOLATIONISM. END SUMMARY

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2. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND AUSTRALIANS GENERALLY HAVE

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BEEN MOVED BY THE PLIGHT OF THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM. SEVEN AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE C-130S ARE IN AND AROUND SOUTH VIETNAM ASSISTING IN RELIEF OPERATIONS. THESE PLANES WERE DESPATCHED TO SOUTHEAST ASIA ON MARCH 29, WITHIN HOURS OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S RECEIVING OUR REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO CONTRIBUTED A$1 MILLION ON APRIL 2 TO THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES TO ASSIST VIETNAMESE REFUGEES; EXPEDITED ARRANGEMENTS TO TRANSPORT 496 VIETNAMESE ORPHANS TO AUSTRALIA WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS; AND ON APRIL 2 LAUNCHED A PUBLIC APPEAL THROUGH THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR OVERSEAS AID TO ASSIST VIETNAMESE REFUGEES. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM CONTRIBUTED A$50,000 TO OPEN THIS APPEAL, WHICH IS DESCRIBED AS THE LARGEST PUBLIC FUND RAISING DRIVE IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY. OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE PRESSING THE GOVERNMENT TO DO EVEN MORE AND, GIVEN THE CLIMATE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN AUSTRALIA, WE BELIEVE AUSTRALIA WILL DO MORE THAN ITS SHARE TO PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME OF THE CONFLICT THERE.

3. EVENTS IN VIETNAM HAVE ALSO REOPENED OLD POLITICAL WOUNDS. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CAIRNS IN A SMUG STATEMENT MARCH 31, 1975 SAID THAT A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO END THE VIETNAMESE BLOODSHED. HIS SENTIMENTS WERE ECHOED BY ALP MINISTER FOR URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT UREN. THESE STATEMENTS WERE STRONGLY ATTACKED BY OPPOSITION LEADER MALCOLM FRASER, SHADOW DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN, AND EDITORIALS IN SEVERAL AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS. MR. FRASER SAID ON APRIL 1; QTE DR, CAIRNS... HAS INDICATED THAT THE PARIS ACCORDS COULD NEVER WORK AND HE IS VIRTUALLY EXULTANT AT THE PROSPECT OF A NORTH VIETNAMESE VICTORY.

4. QTE DR. CAIRNS PORTRAYED HIMSELF AS A GREAT HUMANITARIAN WHEN HE LED THE MORATORIUM MARCHES. HE WAS CONCERNED FOR PEACE AND GOOD WILL. IT NOW APPEARS HE IS MUCH MORE CONCERNED WITH A COMMUNIST VICTORY. END QTE

5. AN EDITORIAL IN APRIL 1 SYDNEY DAILY TELEGRAPH SAID ABOUT CAIRNS' STATEMENT QTE IT WAS THE ALOOD REMARK OF A MAN WHO CARES ONLY ABOUT IDEOLOGIES. END QTE

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6. OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE ALSO USED THE VIETNAM DEBACLE AS A VEHICLE FOR ATTACKING THE FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICIES OF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT. MR FRASER SAID ON APRIL 1 QTE THE IMMEDIATE TRAGIC EVENTS IN INDO-CHINA AS COMMUNIST FORCES OVERRUN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA MUST RAISE GRAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE STRATEGIES.

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7. QTE .... POLITICAL REALITIES HAVE NOW DISCREDITED THE GO-
VERNMENT'S POLICIES. THE DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR NEAR-NORTH SHOW
THAT THE WHITLAM POLICIES HAVE BEEN BUILT UPON A FALSE AND
UNREALISTIC PREMISE. THE LABOR STRATEGY ASSUMED A STABLE
WORLD AND AN ERA OF GOOD WILL BETWEEN ALL COUNTRIES.

8. QTE. THIS IS PATENTLY NONSENSE, AS DEMONSTRATED BY EVENTS
NOT ONLY IN INDO-CHINA BUT IN THE MIDDLE EAST. END QTE

9. SHADOW DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN WAS EVEN MORE BLUNT ON
APRIL 2:

10. QTE I WOULD ONLY HOPE THAT NOBODY ATTACKS US WITHIN THE
NEXT 24 HOURS...WE HAVE THE GOVERNMENT DECLARING INNER QTE WELL
THERE IS NO PROSPECT OF A THREAT AGAINST AUSTRALIA FOR THE NEXT
15 YEARS END INNER QTE...AS THINGS STAND AT THE MOMENT WE WOULD
NOT BE ABLE TO DEFEND BOTANY BAY (SOUTH SIDE OF SYDNEY) AGAINST AN
ENEMY ON A HOT SUNDAY AFTERNOON. END QTE

11. VIETNAMESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE ALSO LED TO DOUBTS ABOUT
THE VALIDITY OF US SECURITY GUARANTEES AND FEARS OF A US
RETREAT INTO ISOLATIONISM. SHADOW DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN
PUT IT SUCCINTLY ON APRIL 2:

12. QTE...THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IS NOW PREOCCUPIED
AND REGRETTABLY WITHDRAWING INTO A STATE OF ISOLATIONISM.
OF COURSE, WE HAVE THE ANZUS AGREEMENT, OF COURSE WE HAVE
THE LINKS OF OLD, BUT THE SIMPLE TRUTH SEEMS TO ME TO BE THAT
YOU CAN'T GET SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE OF AN INTERNATIONAL AGREE-
MENT AND YOU CAN'T NECESSARILY RELY UPON THE LINKS OF OLD NO
MATTER HOW FIERCE THEY MAY HAVE BEEN IN THE PAST. END QTE

13. VIEWS OF THIS NATURE HAVE ALSO BEEN EXPRESSED IN EDI-
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TORIALS IN MOST LEADING AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS IN THE PAST
FEW DAYS.
GREEN

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